

Let Your Online Learning Community Grow:

3 Design Principles for Growing Successful Email Listservs and Online Forums in Educational Settings

By Caleb John Clark

San Diego State University
Department of Educational Technology
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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
THREE PRINCIPLES.....	5
PRINCIPLE #1: DON'T BUILD, GROW.....	5
<i>Environment</i>	6
<i>Give and Get Give!</i>	7
<i>Growing Listservs</i>	8
<i>Growing online Forums</i>	8
PRINCIPLE #2: COMMUNITIES NEED STRONG LEADERS.....	9
<i>Cores and Lurkers</i>	10
<i>Leaders mantras</i>	11
<i>Leading listservs</i>	11
<i>Leading forums</i>	11
PRINCIPLE #3: ENCOURAGE PERSONAL NARRATIVE	12
<i>The "How was your week?" Technique</i>	14
<i>Personal Narrative on listservs</i>	15
<i>Personal Narrative on online Forums:</i>	15
CONCLUSION	15
APPENDICES.....	16
APPENDIX A: A BRIEF REPORT ON AN ONLINE HELP DESK	16
APPENDIX B: HELP DESK SUBSCRIBE AND UNSUBSCRIBE MESSAGES	17
APPENDIX C: NOEND GROUP.....	19
REFERENCES	21

Abstract

This paper proposes 3 principles for growing successful email listservs and online forums in educational settings.

These principles are derived from: The study of successful online communities like The WELL, Echo, and MUDs; The author's experience growing an online learning community for distance learners; growing the NoEnd Web developers group; hosting a forum on Netscape Inc.'s "Professional Connections".

The three principles are:

1. Online learning communities are grown, not built.
2. Online learning communities need leaders.
3. Personal narrative is vital to online learning communities.

Specific examples of how educators can apply these principles to the design and growth of email listservs and online forums are given, as well as examples of how they worked in successful online communities.

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Introduction

At the time of this writing, "building online communities" is all the rage in the wired world. The digerati and their clients are bandying about the phrase "building online community" like teens in a high school hall. Books like "Net Gain" helped start this flame with companies by showing them how possible profit worked in these new entities. Before that, famous online communities like the WELL, Echo, and news about MUDs, chat rooms, IRC, and Usenet has set fuel in place. Now companies like GeoCities, The Globe, America Online, Netscape, Inc., and design companies like NAIMA have been successfully developing commercial communities for profit. Everywhere you look on the Web there seems to be online forums, chat rooms and listservs, not to mention Usenet and MUDs.

This fire has crossed the line into online *learning* communities as well. Online learning communities defined here as email listservs, online forums, MUDs, chat rooms, etc. are being used as tools in a school, on/offline class, or online training. Distance learning is all ablaze and Web based classes with online forums and email listservs, are popping up like mushrooms after a hard rain.

All too often however, the valuable lessons learned from the successful online communities are not being applied to online learning communities.

This paper will propose three design principles from online community that apply to online learning communities as well.

The three principles are:

1. Online learning communities are grown, not built.
2. Online learning communities need leaders.
3. Personal narrative is vital online learning communities.

These principles come from a synthesis of four sources:

1. Research on successful online communities like The WELL, Echo, the learning community MircoMUSE
2. The author's experience growing a community of learners around an online Help Desk for graduate students taking online courses at SDSU.

3. The author's experience growing the NoEnd group, email list serve.
4. The author's experience as a host for hire in a online forum on Netscape Inc. Professional Connections.

The goal of this paper is to flesh out three key design principles that educators can use to make better online communities using listservs and online forums.

Three Principles

Principle #1: Don't build, grow.

Online learning communities should be grown, not built. Online communities are strongest when grown by members into unique and supportive, environments.

"The Net is made up of hundreds of thousands of separate communities, each with it's own special character." (Bruckman 1996). Some of the strongest online communities have grown naturally in supportive environments. Craig's List grew out of one man sending out job notices and apartment listings to his friends. Now Craig's List is a nonprofit organization reaching 37,000 people daily (Knefel 1998). Echo, a famous New York City based virtual salon, grew from the mind and energy of one very dynamic woman and a close group of friends (Horn 1998). The most famous online community, The WELL, was started in 1985 by a very small group. 11 years later it had 10,000 members and over 250 quality conferences (Hafner 1997). As architects of online learning communities, it is important to remember to try and control the growth, not the group.

My own experience starting the NoEnd group has confirmed this as well. You can create an environment and plant some seeds, but it's the members of a community that grow that community. Even the big companies who are said to be "building online communities" are really growing them by giving, or selling, the tools with which people can grow their own.

What the Globe, and other Web ventures, from American Online, to Santa Monica,

California based GeoCities, are doing is not so much creating community, as providing tools for the creation of community. And people are beginning to use those tools in large numbers. (Weber 1997)

Amy Jo Kim, head of NAIMA, a well known design firm specializing in designing commercial online communities, has a set of guidelines for development.

1. Communicate the purpose of the community
2. Specify the ritual and requirements of membership
3. Decide on the participation and personality of the leaders
4. Provide clear guidance for new members
5. Offer growth opportunities for established members.
6. Create a policy for handling disputes and disruptions
7. Cultivate cyclic rhythms for events and communications. (Campell 1997)

These guide lines are all about controlling growth, not about the actual growth process of the community. The process is taken up by the members as they contribute their energy to the community giving it the ability to provide support, value, knowledge, and identity. And for growth like this to occur, you need to have a good environment.

Environment

One of the most interesting and ethereal part of growing online communities is their environment.

Online communities exist within a radically different environment. The setting is a (1) network of (2) digital (3) information, and each of these three different features drives important changes . It is a world of information rather than physical objects. (Kollock, 1996)

At first glance online communities don't even *have* an environment. But further thinking reveals that they do. The environment of an online community consists of the graphic user interface (GUI), look and feel from the design, the tone of welcome messages, and the names given passwords and banners. As Judith Donath (1997) of MIT proposed in her recent dissertation,

In order to foster vibrant and viable online communities, the environment - i.e. the technical infrastructure and user interface, must provide the means to communicate social cues and information. (Donath 1997)

This is backed up by Amy Bruckman (1996), a well known researcher from MIT on educational text based virtual reality environments, or MUDs, when she wrote,

Many of the traditional tools and techniques of architects, such as lighting and texture, will translate into the design of virtual environment. Depending on your choice of background color and texture, type styles, and special fade-in effects, for instance, A Web page can feel playful or gloomy, futuristic or old fashioned, serious or fun, grown-up or child-centered

Just because it's online, doesn't mean the effects of design disappear.

Give and Get Give!

Online learning communities grow best when there is value to being part of them. To have value, members must give and take information in a delicate balance. Communities like the WELL are known for the amazing willingness of the members to help anybody that asks, making for what has been discussed as "gift economies", and the exchange of "public goods" (Kollock 1994). Good communities offer support to members. Offline, this means schools, water, roads, fire and police protection, etc. Online, support comes in the form of information. Gift economies rich in public goods, like the WELL, are famous for the gifts of high quality information their members have access to.

We are naturally good at taking information and hoarding it. But we have trouble giving it up. In the information world, hoarding and not giving isolates one from the wealth of information others have. This leaves one in a vacuume filled with only the media feeds, and without the high quality information that comes from individuals experience.

One of the hardest things to do in any online community is to get people to give information. One reason is that people just don't naturally think their way of doing things has value, when in fact it is the very heart of a community's value!

This is especially true in online learning communities where the exchange of information is key to keeping students coming back. On the Help Desk student listserv the group became a real community when people started posting drafts of assignments and planning study chats on their own that were not announced anywhere else.

The give and take of good information is essential for providing value in any online community. Online learning communities need to provide an environment that gives members value for participating. With the NoEnd group's listserv, it's about quality information backed up by a foundation of emotional support, as this Quote from a Wired News story ([Brown 1997](#)) suggests:

Beyond just building a support group, the network is designed to put people with questions together with people with answers on everything from ad rates to Perl scripting, and numerous projects have been spawned by people that met via the list. As one woman attested this weekend, she can now charge twice as much for her production services as she could a year ago, since she can tap the collective knowledge set of several hundred Web-whizzes. ([Brown 1997](#))

Growing Listservs

The growing of email listserves starts with paying very close attention to the name of the list, the email address, and the automatic messages generated when users subscribe and unsubscribe, ([see appendix B for examples of messages](#)). This is where the tone is first set on a listserv. When users unsubscribe from the famous Echo online community, they are sent a letter and a poem as a way of saying good bye. ([Horn 1998](#)). Controlling these variables is a way of controlling the environment from start to finish. For the [Help Desk](#) student only listserv we chose "student@etbeach.sdsu.edu" as the email address; "student" because no professors were on the list, and "etbeach" because we're doing Educational Technology in sunny San Diego. Another important tactic of for teachers to add value by using their listservs to broadcast valuable information that is not available anywhere else.

Growing online Forums

For an online forum, the environment can also be controlled by the naming of the forums and treads. Since most online forums now have a Web browser interface, all the tricks of Web page design can be used to create a unique place with a specific tone. In terms of the topics themselves, the first post is the most important for setting tone. On the [Netscape Professional Connections](#) forum, hosts write a short first post about what the topic will cover, and then write a second post that states the host's point of view on the topic. Every word is an opportunity to control the environment.

Principle #2: Communities need strong leaders.

Online learning communities need strong leaders. Leaders are needed to define the environment, keep it safe, give it purpose, identity and keep it growing.

"During a computer conferencing course, the teacher must adopt the role of facilitator, not content provider." (Jonassen 1996, pp 446). Jonassen goes on to quote an online tutor as saying :

The facilitator needs to pay careful attention to welcoming each student to the electronic course, and reinforcing early attempts to communicate. In the first few weeks, I make sure my notes in the conference specifically reference prior student notes. I send many individual messages to students suggesting resources and generally reaching out to students.

Call them coaches, facilitators, teachers, or what ever you want. When you get right down to it, it all means leaders. The virtual world is a mediated environment (Donath 1997) and mediation needs mediators. But all to often educators are hesitant to have people with so much power in a learning environment. This is understandable, but dangerous. Over the years communities like the WELL naturally developed hosts for each topic for very good reasons, and every listserv has a "listmom" for very good reasons. Hosting and Listmoms started because of administrative needs. Online forums and listservs needed to all have a maintenance contact for mis-postings, server problems, crashes, and the putting out of flames that can monopolize a discussion. But the byproducts of this administrative need also have become evident. Without a single person that everyone knows is responsible for the list or forum, members have no one to go to with problems, no one to give the place an identity, no one who cares about the place, no one to welcome new people, no one to start new topics, and archive old ones. Leaderless listservs and online forums are like teacherless classrooms.

"Written statements of purpose and codes of conduct can help communities stay focused and appropriate." (Bruckman, 1996a). Without leaders, these kind of documents never get written. Another crucial role of leaders is to help online communities establish an identity. Imagine the quotes below without leaders.

Echo, a famous online community in New York City, was started by Stacy Horn, "Smart,

stylish, and deliberately outrageous, Horns the role model and patron saint of the Echo-ites" ([Bruckman, 1996a](#)).

About [NoEnd](#): "What started as a handful of Web developers and designers getting together at a bar to share their woes about working online has, two years on, become a group of mailing lists with more than 300 members, a series of meetings with speakers ranging from Thomas Dolby to the designers of Salon, plus parties, bonfires, and copious amounts of microbrewer beer." ([Brown 1997](#))

All too often educators shy away from having leaders in online communities, in yet every group needs leadership to facilitate the group's growth. Peter Kollock and Marc Smith ([1994](#)) wrote of Elinor Ostrom's work studying terrestrial communities rich in public goods. Here's what she found to be some commonalties:

1. Group Boundaries are clearly defined.
2. Rules governing the use of collective goods are well matched to local needs and conditions.
3. Most individuals affected by these rules can participate in modifying the rules.
4. The rights of community members to devise their own rules is respected by external authorities.
5. A system for monitoring member's behavior exists; this monitoring is undertaken by the community members themselves.
6. A graduated system of sanctions is used.
7. Community members have access to low-cost conflict resolutions mechanisms.

Imagine all of these things getting done without leaders to do them!

Cores and Lurkers

Online communities naturally develop small cores of very active people as they grow. At the same time, a large group of "lurkers" usually grows too. As Stacy Horn puts it, lurkers, "Follow the action but rarely jump in. They read but do not post. They are the voyeurs of Cyberspace. It's allowed." ([Horn 1998](#))

The [Help Desk](#) mailing list had about 20 subscribers, yet only 10 to 20% were active. The rest "lurked" for months reading the information posted. The NoEnd mailing list has 300 subscribers; only a core of less than fifty post regularly. The WELL also developed a close core of the most active posters ([Reingold 1993](#)). Echo was grown by Stacy Horn and a small group of close friends who were the most active and set the tone for the entire

community. (Horn 1997). Leaders of online communities must embrace and encourage these active cores to develop, while at the same time letting lurkers lurk.

Leaders mantras

My mantras for leading any online community:

1. All you need is love
2. Control the environment, not the group.
3. Lead by example
4. Let lurkers lurk
5. Short leading questions get conversations going
6. Be personally congratulatory and inquisitive.
7. Route information in all directions.
8. Care about the people in the community. This can not be faked.
9. Understand consensus and how to build it, and sense when it's been built and just not recognized, and when you have to make a decision despite all the talking.

Leading listservs

Listmoms need to form a presence and identity so that every person on the listserv knows who to go to for questions, and problems. Listmoms also need to read EVERY post so that they catch flames sparking up and problems in the making.

Leading forums

Hosts in online forums are like the host of a party. You set up the decorations, the bar, the food, and get people to come. You greet people at the door, make sure they can find the bathroom, and introduce them to folks they might like talking to. If there's a fight, hosts have to deal with it. Good parties usually have good hosts.

Hosts in online educational forums define the tone of the forum from their personality and writing style, just as they do in other communities. Hosts need to welcome all new members, achieve stale topics, define and start new topics, keep topics on topic, and read

all posts. Hosts start and maintain topics about where to find help and help those in need.

Principle #3: Encourage personal narrative

Personal narrative is vital to online learning communities. Personal stories and experiences add closeness, and provide identity, thus strengthening online communities.

"We need to know how people do the ordinary things, not the extraordinary," writes the famous narrotologist, Roger Shank ([1990](#)).

I believe the sharing of personal narratives is the most important part of any online learning community. My experience and research backs this up. Personal narrative is the sun that makes communities grow; the little stories of our lives, the things we tell our mate when they ask, "How was your day, dear?". Personal narrative is vital because it builds identity in a bodiless place, and provides understanding and support circles.

Currently, many educational listservs and online forums are just wastelands of dry posts mandated by assignments and requirements, instead of vibrant learning communities. Study of successful online communities reveal that personal narrative abounds in successful online communities ([Rheingold 1993](#)), ([Horn 1998](#)), ([NoEnd](#)), ([Help Desk](#)).

Research on communities, on and offline, supports the need for establishing identity. Stories are a powerful way for humans to anchor identity. Members individual identity is critical to the formation of any close group. Online you have no identity by merely existing and being seen, as we do offline. As Judith Donath ([1997](#)) points out in her recent dissertation on the design of online communities,

We need to know each other's identity in order to form affiliations, interpret communications, and establish responsibility and reputation. Yet identity online is problematic. Cues are missing, it is malleable and ephemeral. The body, which anchors identity in the real world is absent.

In online communities, our bodies are not ourselves. Thrown into the non-corporeal world of online communities, people tend to float around like gray drones with no identity. All over the Net fabricated online communities can be found waiting to be filled.

They are dark with the absence of real individual humans with identities all their own. Vibrant and warm communities, like The WELL, (Rheingold 1993) or the successful online learning community MicroMUSE, (Dykes-Woodruff & Walkdorf 1995) are rife with personal narrative, characters, and the identity and closeness they bring.

But why personal narrative? Because in a world of words, the way to build identity is to tell stories. Stories about your life are as unique as your body is. Peter Kollock at the UCLA Center for the Study of Online Communities, recognized the need for identity when he outlined three basic features required of successful online communities, "Ongoing interaction, identity persistence, knowledge of previous interactions" (Kollock 1996).

Does the value of personal narrative apply to educational settings? Yes. Educators need to help students form identities online because people in any group need identity for it to be a strong group. Imagine a classroom where students had no identity of their own.

Identity is not only needed by members of a learning community, but the community itself needs to have an identity all its own. Echo had Stacy Horn as it's leader (Horn 1998) and the WELL's identity is famous. When Wired Magazine did a feature on the WELL in 1995. The story opened with an account of a famous WELL member saying good bye to life (Hafner 1997). This was no accident; The WELL has several famous stories and characters and is to this day very human and personal. Howard Rheingold (1993), writing about an early WELL conference on parenting, said:

There is a magic protective circle around the atmosphere of this particular conference. We're talking about our sons and daughters in this forum, not about our computers or opinions about philosophy, and many of us feel that this tacit understanding sanctifies the virtual space.

In an educational setting, personal narrative is just as important in creating identity. One of the reasons MUDs have been successful online learning communities (Dykes-Woodruff & Walkdorf 1995) is that they let students make fully fleshed-out characters and then act them out and take them on adventures. Amy Bruckman has referred to MUDs as "identity workshops" (Bruckman 1992).

Educators growing online learning communities must not only ferret out the personal narrative of their students, but also create an identity for the community as a whole by sharing their own personal narratives.

The "How was your week?" Technique

Human beings are collections of stories. They accumulate stories over a lifetime, and when they are given the opportunity, they select an appropriate story and tell it. ([Shank 1990](#)).

I borrowed the technique of asking people how their week was from support groups and used it when I started [NoEnd](#). The foundation of the NoEnd group was in-person meetings that involved going around a circle and having each person tell the group how their week was. Once the NoEnd listserv was started, this tone carried over to it.

"Humanize" is written on the bottom of every NoEnd post and a few of 300 to 900 (depending on the year) people on the list always break the normal flow of high quality Web development posts with posts about trips, movie reviews, poems, thoughts, essays, and rants. This built the identity of the list itself. NoEnd is known as a technical list that encourages poetry and regular meetings in person. To presenters NoEnd is known as place to abandon formal presentations and just sit back and get asked questions. To companies in the Bay Area, it is known as a list that they should have at least one employee subscribed to.

Not all people will post personal narratives. But the effect of reading personal narratives on lurkers is that it builds a sense of identity to the list as a whole.

Because of the success of this technique, I've started a topic on [Netscape Professional Connections](#) with the title "How was your week". This topic is in the top five most popular topics in my forum. People from all over the world are logging in and stopping by and writing about their week before they go on to the specific discussions. Here's a typical post:

How Was Your Week?:

#44 of 98 by (xx xx) Sat 18 Apr '98 (03:56 AM)

My week was a nightmare. I'm glad it's over. Short week 'cos of Easter, 3 week old baby ensuring no sleep, a three-day workshop to run/present on Adult Learning, and a major proposal to write and deliver Friday. Summer doesn't want to end, the hottest Summer in New Zealand 'since reliable records began in 1880'...

On the [Help Desk](#)'s student listserv, we frequently sent out leading letters asking the students how things were going. But we didn't just ask; we also told them how we were doing, how our weeks were going. This combination made for a vibrant and supportive

listserv that helped students organize student sessions and exchange ideas and ways of completing assignments.

Never underestimate the simple act of asking a person what has happened in their life lately. Communities must care about their members to be strong. Caring how someone's week is the best way I've found to do that.

Personal Narrative on listservs

On listservs people should be encouraged to introduce themselves after subscribing. Listmoms should frequently post short messages about how they are doing to build identity and respect for their role, as well as encourage others to post similar postings. Key students should be asked to share how they did assignments with the list.

Personal Narrative on online Forums:

Start a topic in every class forum that is named something like, "How was your week?" or, "What's going on". It is also common to have an "Introductions" topic in most online forums. Further, pictures can be posted in some forums and should be encouraged as much as possible. Post short leading questions like, "How did you do that?". Teachers should also share how their week was going to lead by example.

Conclusion

A good environment, good leaders, with a healthy dose of personal narrative tilled into the cybersoil, helps grow strong online learning communities where real learning and thinking can bloom.

Before we gallivant off into the pixelated sunset to grow our own online learning communities, let us take heed of the lessons learned from the successful online communities that came before us.

Having pondered and understood what has worked, we can gallivant off on our trusty horse (perhaps named "bit"?), find a fertile plot on the Net, and begin tilling the soil and planting the seeds for our own online learning community.

Appendices

Appendix A: A Brief report on an online Help Desk

Help! It's an online learning community

What worked and what didn't on a Technical Help Desk for Distance Learners at SDSU Department of Educational Technology

Help Desk Web site: <http://coe.sdsu.edu/help/index.html>

Dates and Goals

January, 1998. Educational Technology Department, San Diego State University. The faculty hires graduate students Caleb John Clark and Chris Haddock to design, build, and staff a technical help desk for 25 online graduate students, enrolled in EDTEC 540 -- Introduction to Educational Technology, and EDTEC 541 -- Introduction to Multimedia Production.

The primary goal of the Help Desk was to help online students with technical problems; such as, opening attachments, FTPing files, using the class materials sent on disk, accessing chat rooms, or completing their Director projects. For traditional students, these questions would be answered by the Instructional Media Lab Staff, but online students directed these questions to the professors.

The secondary goal of the Help Desk was to design and build a prototype Help Desk that could be expanded for use by all graduate students in the Department of Educational Technology.

Time Line

Week	Activity
0-2	Designed and posted Help Desk Web site Opened Help Desk email account. Answered students' email questions within 24 hours
2-3	Set up and manned Chat Room and Forum from 3:00-4:00 M-TH.
4	Created listserv for all online students

Results

Email provided the bulk of the technical support. Online students sent 120 technical questions between February 4th and May 18th. We believe that our informal tone was largely responsible for success of the email (and listserv). Each letter started with a person's first name, followed by a greeting. We deliberately attempted to make a personal connection with each student.

The student listserv was very successful in building an online learning community. 22, online students sent 172 messages to the listserv between March 2nd and May 18th. Again the Help Desk staff set the tone of the listserv with messages such as, "How's everyone doing?" Posts included stories, poems, descriptions of the students physical surroundings, cries for help, venting of stress and family issues. Caleb and I were able to measure the "pulse" of the class by monitoring the listserv relating that information to the professors. The online students "officially" took ownership of the listserv when they coordinated their own study group and chats. As with most listservs, a core of about 10% of the users were responsible for 90% of the posts, with the remaining students lurking.

The Web site was the third most useful area of the help desk, with Job Aids being the most useful part of the site.

The chat area was used for a few weeks during a mid-semester crisis, but was otherwise empty. The online forums were not used at all despite postings by the staff. This could be due to the fact that both classes had online forums and chat rooms that the students were required to use.

Telephone contact was made with three students after email and chat failed to solve their problems.

Appendix B: Help Desk Subscribe and Unsubscribe Messages

Subscribed message:

From: macjordomo@etbeach.sdsu.edu

Date: Sat, 16 May 1998 20:56:36 -0700 (PDT)

Subject: Your message to macjordomo@etbeach.sdsu.edu

(You might want to keep this message for future reference.)

You're now subscribed to student! Welcome. We're glad you subscribed.

This is a listserv for students taking distance courses at SDSU in the spring of 1998. It is a student only listserv.

To send a message to all the students on this list, send a letter to:

"students@etbeach.sdsu.edu"

***To keep the signal to noise ratio high, and to keep it as human as we can, please read the following words.

This list is for distance students to share information, gossip, and do what being at a distance makes otherwise impossible. Consider this list your hallway, or campus cafe. Some ground rules.

- *No posts that incite flames

- *Respect the words of others

- *Be responsible for your words

- *Give, as well as take, information.

- * Use accurate subject headers:

Example: "URL: great design" "POEM: flowers" "INFO: Flash/Java" "HELP: Video?"
"JOB: Netscape"

- *Reply privately whenever possible.

If you need to unsubscribe to the list please send a message with "UNSUBSCRIBE student" to: macjordomo@etbeach.sdsu.edu.

You can get a list of the commands and the options that this listserver accepts by sending a message with "HELP" in the body of a message to: macjordomo@etbeach.sdsu.edu.

Questions?: et_help@mail.sdsu.edu

Unsubscribe message:

From: macjordomo@etbeach.sdsu.edu

Date: Sat, 16 May 1998 20:46:44 -0700 (PDT)

Subject: Your message to macjordomo@etbeach.sdsu.edu

You are no longer a subscriber to student

Thank you for your words while you where here.

If you would like to give us feedback, please email to "et_help@mail.sdsu.edu"

Thank you.

Appendix C: NoEnd Group

See a story on NoEnd in *Wired News* at:

<http://www.wired.com/news/news/culture/story/9749.html>.

NoEnd was co-founded by Caleb J. Clark and Paul Vachier. It started as a group of Web developers that Caleb organized to meet in a local cafe in San Francisco in January of 1996. The goal was to to humanize technology. The main point of meeting was to go around to each person and see how their week of Web developing was. Word of mouth spread to all the isolated Web masters in San Francisco and within months there was a very active listserv that grew to 900 subscribers from around the world. Postings on the list ranged from Web development and social planning to the all-important poetry and personal essays. Face to face meetings took place in a warehouse with guest speakers like Apple, Macromedia, Salon magazine asking to present. These meetings still involved going around the circle to see how people were doing and were still very, very, informal. After the first months of growth, Paul then took over running NoEnd and does to this day with Caleb acting as "spiritual leader." From the beginning Caleb posted his personal essays on the list and was encouraged to keep doing so. Eric Wolfram has been the listmom for over a year and also writes personal essays that are very popular. The listserv has gone through wild times, surviving a cut from 900 members to 300 members by changing the address and passing the new one out only at meetings.

NoEnd has been very insistent about not publishing information about the listserv in the press, so very little information exists about the group besides the Wired News story and the Web site. The attitude is, if you want to get on the list, come to a meeting.

Suffice it to say that the group is made up of some of the best Web developers in the Bay

Area and the signal to noise ratio is stunningly low. The NoEnd list is still characterized by posts about people's experiences, poems and personal essays.

Appendix D: Netscape Professional Connections

I was hired to be a host, and to be part of the building of, Netscape Inc. Professional Connections in December of 1997. Professional Connections is an effort by Netscape Inc. to create online community using Well Engaged online forum software. Having gone through a productive Beta testing cycle, Professional Connections is now open to the public with discussions ranging from Web commerce to product forums about commercial software. I host the Issues and Ideas forum. (Note: After a year of hosting my time at Netscape Inc. ended when Professional Connections was shut down when AOL purchased Netscape Inc.)

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A Few Online Community URLs:

(links good as of 5-20-98)

Learning communities

MOOSE Crossing

<http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~asb/moose-crossing/>

The learning space, an online learning community for teachers

<http://www.learningspace.org/>

Centers of study

The Electronic Learning Communities Research Group at Georgia Tech. (Amy Bruckman)

<http://www.cc.gatech.edu/elc/>

UCLA Center for the Study of Online Community. (Peter Kollock, Marc Smith...)

<http://netscan.sscnet.ucla.edu/csoc/>

The Sociable Media Group at MIT, (Judith Donath)

<http://persona.www.media.mit.edu/SMG/>

Communities and tool makers

Noend

<http://www.noend.org>

Netscape's Professional Connections

http://form.netscape.com/directory/community/html/pc_main.html

The WELL

<http://www.well.com/>

Craig's List

<http://www.listfoundation.org/>

WWWAC List

<http://www.wwwac.org/>

Well Engaged forum software

<http://www.wellengaged.com/>

SparkNet's Sparklist email listserv hosting service

<http://www.sparklist.com/>

Web Crossing online forum software

<http://www.webcrossing.com/>

Black Sun Interactive (3-D communities)

<http://www.blaxxun.com/>

The Palace

<http://www.thepalace.com>

Construct Internet Design

<http://www.construct.net/>

Naima Design

<http://www.naima.com/>

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